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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002837

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/24/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER'S ADVISORS BLAME EVERYTHING ON VP  
AL-HASHIMI

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador Sadiq al-Rikabi, a senior political advisor to PM Maliki, complained on August 23 about U.S. criticism of Maliki. "We are partners, you must treat us as such," said Rikabi, who argued that Maliki was constitutionally "powerless" and therefore not responsible for any government failings. On the leadership meetings, Rikabi's message was that VP Tariq al-Hashimi had sabotaged the meetings at every step in order to ensure that there would be no political progress before the September report. Rikabi promised to provide Embassy a copy of the draft law on de-Ba'athification as agreed to by the sherpas, but rejected by al-Hashimi. Rikabi also provided brief readouts of Maliki's visits to Turkey, Iran and Syria. End summary.

Rikabi: Don't Blame Maliki  
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¶2. (C) In an August 23 meeting at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Ambassador Sadiq al-Rikabi, a senior political advisor to PM Maliki, bemoaned the recent spate of criticism directed at PM Maliki by U.S. officials (i.e., a clear reference to Senator Levin's comments and the subsequent White House commentary). "We are partners, you must treat us as such," said Rikabi, who pointedly added that "deadlines for political progress are not helpful." Poloff rejoined that members of Congress, like members of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, were free to express their opinions; that subsequent statements by the President and the White House spokesman were supportive of the PM; and that further criticism was inevitable in the run-up to the September report. Poloff volunteered his personal opinion that Maliki would be well-advised to grow a thicker skin than he displayed in Damascus, where his comments had only served to accentuate the appearance of discord between Washington and Baghdad. Rikabi said he agreed and, jotting a note to himself, said he would make the point to Maliki.

¶3. (C) Rikabi segued into a painfully weak defense of the PM, saying that under the Iraqi constitution, Maliki could not so much as appoint a personal advisor without the consent of the Council of Representatives (CoR). "He is powerless," said Rikabi. Advisor George Bakoos agreed, adding that Maliki had no authority over the ministries because the ministers answered to their various political bloc leaders. Poloff pushed back, saying it was incumbent upon Maliki to demonstrate leadership, and that tangible political progress would be Maliki's best defense against further criticism.

Blame it on al-Hashimi  
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¶4. (C) Turning to the series of leadership meetings that began on August 18, Rikabi said that VP Tariq al-Hashimi was

creating obstacles at every opportunity. For example, he claimed that al-Hashimi was the only one of the five leaders who refused to sign a communique to be issued at the conclusion of the leadership meetings, on the grounds that al-Hashimi was confused as to which draft of the de-Ba'athification law he was being asked to sign off on. "We told him that his own deputy had negotiated the text with us, and then he wanted to go back and change things. What's the point of our meetings if the deputies are not authorized to negotiate anything?" Rikabi demanded. (NB - Embassy heard separately from al-Hashimi that the Tawafuq deputy had exceeded his instructions by agreeing to unacceptable language at several points. Poloff told Rikabi that it would be easier for the Embassy to engage with al-Hashimi on the de-Ba'athification law if the U.S. had the text agreed to by the deputies; Rikabi promised to provide one.) "We took it as a sign that Dr. Tariq's hidden agenda is to make sure that there is no political progress before September," said Rikabi, who went on to accuse the Sunni VP of raising spurious, last-minute objections to the hydrocarbons law for much the same reason.

¶5. (C) Moreover, said Rikabi, the Shi'ites believe that Tawafuq (with al-Hashimi's concurrence) would refuse to rejoin the government even if all of Tawafuq's demands were met. "Tawafuq will not come back. Therefore, there is no real partnership nor sense of responsibility on their part," said Rikabi. As for the draft agreement between the leaders on power-sharing, Rikabi said that the agreement's lack of detail was not a problem. "The only detail al-Hashimi cares about is that Maliki no longer be Prime Minister," Rikabi said darkly.

PM's Travels  
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¶6. (C) Rikabi summed up Maliki's recent visit to Turkey by saying that the trip was intended to reduce Iraqi-Turkish tensions over the PKK. Rikabi noted that the Turks were refusing to participate in trilateral security meetings with the GOI and MNF-I due to Kurdish insistence that a KRG delegate participate in the talks as a representative of the KRG. According to Rikabi, the PM does not care whether the KRG is represented or not; all that matters is that a solution be found so that the committee can resume its work. Rikabi asked for USG assistance in quietly persuading the Kurds to drop their demand and suggested that the USG should push for the trilateral committee to meet again soon.

¶7. (C) In Tehran, Maliki heard a clear message that the Iranians will cooperate on security and try to prevent infiltrations across the border. "They said they don't want to see a U.S. failure in Iraq, and are not looking to defeat U.S. troops," said Rikabi. However, he added, the Iranians had clear "concerns" about the U.S. military presence. Maliki told the Iranians that chaos in Iraq was not in their interest, and they agreed. Rikabi said that at one point Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei pointed at Maliki and said: "We just want to see an independent government in Iraq, and you are that independent government. We are ready to cooperate with you on the trilateral security group, but we do not see any real readiness on the American side." (When Poloff retorted that, in light of the Iranian-made munitions impacting in the IZ, we might more reasonably question the readiness of the Iranian side, Rikabi joked that if the PMO was hit by an Iranian rocket it would be a case of "friendly fire.")

¶8. (C) In Damascus, Maliki told the Syrians that security is the "golden key" that would unlock better Iraqi-Syrian relations. He offered the promise of oil and gas shipments as a sweetener, but made clear that economic cooperation would be contingent upon improved performance on security. In return, the Syrians said "all the right things," including first-ever declarations of support for Iraq's elected

government, for the Iraqi political process, for national reconciliation, and a condemnation of violence/terrorism. According to Rikabi, when the Syrians made a statement that included a jab at the Coalition, Maliki rebutted by stressing that MNF-I was in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi government and pursuant to a resolution of the UNSC. Maliki concluded his visit by noting that although Iraq and Syria had reached notional agreements, the Iraqis would be watching carefully to see whether those agreements produced any change on the ground.

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